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Dennis L. Johnson

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# The shot seen 'round the world

## The story of a famous picture

BY DENNIS L. JOHNSON

The road from Grand Rapids, MN, to Hibbing and a string of towns on Minnesota's Iron Range, Highway 169, passes through the small town of Bovey just a few miles east of Grand Rapids. If you take a recently completed bypass, you miss the town completely. Yet there, soon after the end of World War I, is found the origins of a world famous photograph.

A commercial photographer, Eric Enstrom, had a small photo shop on main street in Bovey, where his business consisted mostly of taking photos of weddings, graduations, families, and others interested in one of the black and white formal photos of the day, usually in a small folder.

Enstrom had immigrated from Sweden some years earlier, and had been working in Minneapolis for a time, and eventually set up shop in this small town in northern Minnesota where he plied his trade. Although his income mainly came from the families that used his services to record their life events before the widespread use of inexpensive cameras, he also had an artist's eye for photos which were especially expressive. These he kept in a portfolio to submit at the annual Minnesota Photographers Association, in 1918.

One day, an old man showed up at his studio selling various household items such as foot-scrapers door-to-door. Something about his face caught Enstrom's eye, and he had the idea to use him as a subject for a photograph. "He had a kind face, there were no harsh lines in it" Enstrom said, in recalling the 1918 visit of Charles Wilden to his studio. The nation had been through a great war and done without many things, but still had much to be thankful for.

Enstrom thought that to bow his head in prayer would be charac-

teristic of the face of the old visitor. On a table he placed a family book, some spectacles, a bowl of gruel, a loaf of bread, and a knife. He then had Wilden pose in an attitude of prayer, with folded hands to say grace before partaking of a humble meal. The pose came naturally to the elderly man, and the photo was taken. Enstrom later said, "This man doesn't have much of earthly goods, but he has more than most people because he has a thankful heart."

Little notice was taken of the photograph at the Photographers Convention, but Enstrom considered this photo his finest work of all he had taken. He placed a framed print in a prominent position in his window, and many people stopped in to buy one. As soon as one was sold, he printed another to take its place. The popularity spread, and he and his

descendants received a steady income from sales over the years of the original and several colorized versions. Over the years it has become very popular, and is now to be found in many homes, churches, dining halls, and other locations in the U.S. and around the world.

Earlier this year a theatre group in Grand Rapids, The Grand Rapids Players, produced and performed a newly written play, *Picturing Grace*, a story developed from a photograph, written and directed by John Schroeder of Grand Rapids.

The author is Dennis L. Johnson, who lives in Pottstown, PA. His e-mail is <1\_viking@comcast.net>

